

An  
Essay

on

Read March 19 1823  
W. S. H  
Dread

Hepatitis.

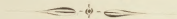
By

Thomas W. Merivether  
of Virginia.

1823.

Handwritten text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page. The text is mostly illegible due to fading and the age of the paper. A prominent word, possibly "Bible", is visible in the center of the page, written in a larger, bolder script than the surrounding text.

An Essay &c.



By the term Hepatitis is usually understood an inflammation of the Liver, which is divided into the acute and chronic states. It is not my intention, however, to confine my remarks to the strictly inflammatory condition of that organ, but also to treat of the not less common form of its diseased termed by Dr James Johnson, "hepatic derangements." This truly classical author, after rejecting the opinion that hepatitis is unknown in Jamaica, very justly remarks, "may my people indeed can not be persuaded that the hepatic functions are at all deranged, unless hepatitis in propria forma be present. & therefore 'is the stomach never disordered except in gastritis?' This laconic question seems to me conclusive, even though the analogy between the functions and

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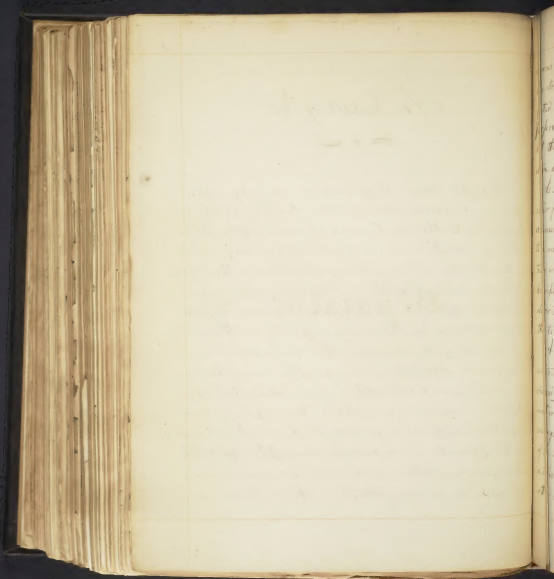
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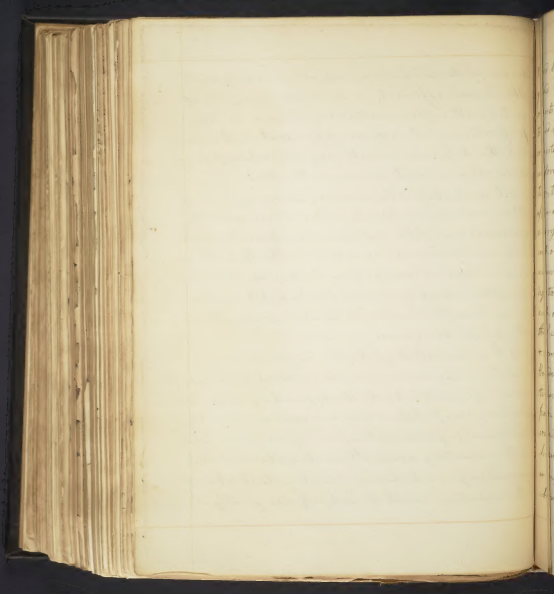
viscera of the two viscera may not be entirely strict. The stomach appears to me to be less frequently affected with inflammation & to have a smaller proportion of its disorders dependant on this cause, but the difference is certainly not such as to preclude all argument from one to the other.

Acute hepatitis is rarely the consequence of other forms of the disease, and as it is usually the commencement of the long train of complaints hereafter to be mentioned, it claims our first attention. Its symptoms in different climates are infinitely varied, but my description shall be confined to such as I have witnessed, or those that are mentioned as occurring within the temperate zones.

A violent attack of this disease rarely comes on without some previous symptoms, which to an experienced eye would indicate the approaching danger. The most common perhaps of these, as may be ascertained by diligent inquiries of the patient, is a disordered state of the alimentary canal. The cause of this, seems to be a deficiency or vitiation of the bile, which like all other secretions must be suppressed or greatly al-



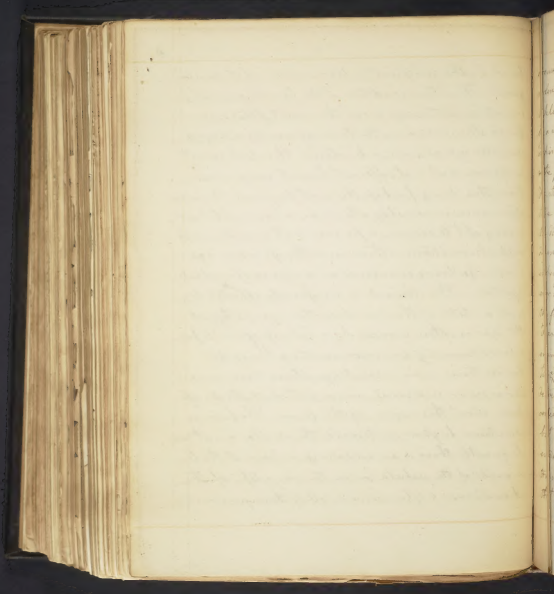
tered by the incipient inflammation of its puerber glands. The altered condition of the bowels generally consists in costiveness, from the want of their accustomed stimulus, & in the faces assuming a clayey consistency, & also an ash colour. This last is not uniform but is of different tines at every evacuation, this being perhaps the most frequent. The former appearance invariably attests an absence of bile, & is very apt to deceive a person not accustomed to such observations— their smoothness & homogeneity being considered an evidence of complete digestion. The stomach is necessarily affected by such a state of the bowels, & the sympathy of the head is often evinced by a fulness of the temples, & sometimes by an excruciating headache. Besides these more violent symptoms there sometimes occur occasional severe, but short attacks of pain about the region of the liver. The pain is sometimes higher up towards the axilla & not uncommonly there is an uneasiness or pain at the lower angle of the scapula, or on the very top of the shoulder. After some or all of these premonitory





circumstances, the Bore comes on with all its force. The violence of its first attack bears me small resemblance to pleurisy: the same difficulty of breathing, attended by a violent stitch in the side on taking too deep an inspiration. The pulse too if not oppressed, is very active & the power of motion is for a time, almost suspended.

The stomach is more frequently affected with nausea & there are sometimes symptoms of colic, but on the whole the diagnosis between pluvium & the first stage of this morbid, in its most violent form, is what I can hardly embody in a description. I am the less solicitous however on this head as the management of each must for the first few hours consist of nearly the same remedies. These though necessarily very powerful, may be soon enumerated, & first (as it deserves to be) ~~xxx~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~xxx~~ <sup>men</sup> ~~xxx~~ <sup>tion</sup> blood-letting. The propriety of this must first be decided on, & I will venture to say, that if the disease proceeds, be genuine acute hepatitis, not only the propriety but the necessity of this first step will very soon be evident to every practitioner who is guided by the symptoms before him. Indeed this fact is so well established, that the blindest devotee of nosology would scarcely be



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The tongue is pink, with brown discoloration in  
 ward the back part & there are sometimes brown  
 streaks along the tongue, but the mouth is moist  
 unless. The respiration is variable & a general  
 dyspnoea during the season in which the disease  
 is common, but it is not the case in the winter  
 & a good night's rest is common.

The bowels are usually in a natural condition,  
 with but a slight increase in activity, but in the  
 summer & treatment. The bowels are  
 generally as before at the end of the season, but  
 the mucous membrane is sometimes inflamed  
 & the bowels are often in a state of  
 indigestion. They are often in a state of  
 indigestion, but the abdominal cavity is not  
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I have now to discuss the subject of the  
 money. The money is of a kind  
 to go to various uses for the benefit of the  
 community, and it is not to be used  
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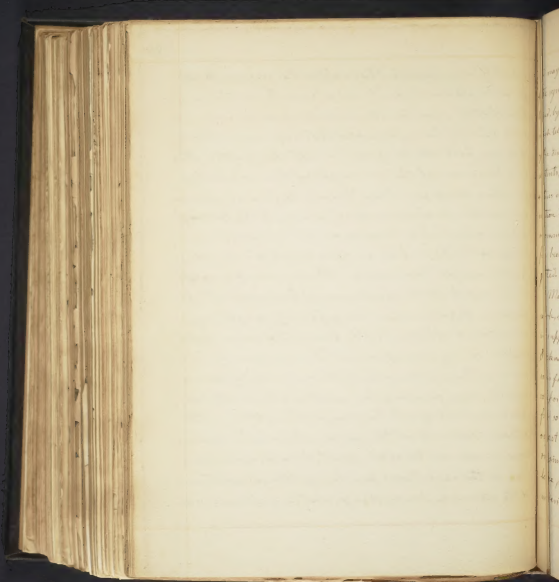


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and may arise from a different cause than mere hepatic sympathy. Hence, the latter can only be ascertained, by a careful examination of the part or organ which tells more in the advanced, than in the first stage of the disorder, or from the examination of the above contents, which is at all times the truest evidence, & thus we are again reduced as our certain <sup>criterion</sup> of information to that observance of the secretions so often recommended, the importance of which has never before been extensively surveyed, or accurately investigated.

Many other quotations from this excellent work, might be very appropriately introduced in support of what has been here advanced, and I acknowledge that it afforded me considerable satisfaction on my first perusal of it after the composition of the principal part of this essay, to find so many coincidences between them. The object of this essay however not being to enlarge, or simplify the present stock of medical knowledge, but merely to give a specimen of my own understanding of medical subjects, I have not pur-





poorly examined the opinions of any author, but  
have endeavoured to describe in a practical man-  
ner, the plan of treating this disease, which the re-  
sult of my present limited & theoretical information,  
without much experience, would lead me to adopt.

My apology for its not being more comprehensive  
& correct, I can not better express, than in these  
few borrowed lines

Oceans lone caves I would not roam,  
In peerly grandeur decked,  
Its bosom'd treasures from their home,  
All glittering to select,  
Nor stray to mines of ascher ore,  
Since from my own agon ask  
The native gems.

